

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #449-2

with

Helen S. M. Kam Lau (HL)

June 18, 1993

‘Aiea, O`ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mrs. Helen Lau on June 18, 1993, at her home in ‘Aiea, O`ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Mrs. Lau, let's continue. Nineteen thirty-five you started working for the [U.S.] Marine [Corps] laundry.

HL: Laundry. Pearl Harbor.

WN: Can you tell me something about it? How you got the job.

HL: Well, when they had that federal openings, I just applied for that. And then they called, that's all. And I accepted because those days we don't have supermarkets and department stores, big ones. There's no hiring so I accept the job and work over there.

WN: What other choices did you have? What other options did you have for work? Besides federal government, was there anything else?

HL: No, I don't think so. I just applied for the federal one. And that's the only opening, I think. So that's all.

WN: So this was after you graduated high school. So you graduated in June and then. . . .

HL: I started working. And then I worked until I got married [*in 1937*] and then, still working, then I had my first child [*in 1937*]. I continue working because my mother-in-law said she will watch [*the child*] for me. So I went back work. And in 1939, I think, when I was going have my second one, then I quit. And then I stayed home, take care those two. And I didn't go back work until 1951, I think. Until the children grew up or can take care themselves a little bit (chuckles).

WN: So this was the [U.S.] Marine [Corps] laundry at Pearl Harbor?

HL: Uh huh [*yes*].

WN: I see. So what did you do?

HL: Well, cashier, make invoices for the payments and collect the bills. See, the [U.S.] Marines, when the ship comes in, we have to charge it all to the ship. All the whole bulk and everything. And we just calculate all the sheets, how much and everything. And when they come in we collect the money and everything.

WN: But this is all with military?

HL: Yeah, all military.

WN: So you didn't deal with the public at all?

HL: No, none at all. All military. And then in the meantime we have a priority to go to the [*post*] exchange to get things (chuckles).

WN: PX?

HL: Yeah, PX. So was good. I think I worked '36 to '39, about three years. And then I quit.

WN: So was it mostly local people working?

HL: Oh, yeah. All older women working there. I think I was the youngest there (laughs).

WN: How did you feel about that?

HL: No, I got along with them (chuckles). They were nice to me and everything. But they were [*working*] inside, with that pressures washing [*clothing*] and all those things. I was [*working at*] window [*i.e., clerical*] side, see. But we get along. In fact, they think I was their baby, they always call (laughs). They were so nice. Lot of Hawaiian ladies, you know, working there. I think majority Hawaiian and Chinese. Those days no Japanese in there.

WN: How was the pay?

HL: The pay is okay. I think it's better than minimum [*wages at*] those outside kind jobs, you know. It's something like the federal [government], that's why. We get paid by the federal. And then we have enough vacation and sick leave.

WN: How were your bosses?

HL: Oh, they were the top boss of marine officers. And then we have one civilian boss that look over all. So it's okay, they nice. Men boss. I think we have one Korean guy, a Mr. Lee or something. So that's the only job I work there.

WN: Did you enjoy it?

HL: Yeah. I like it. We get to talk and all. They're friendly bunch and so. . . .

WN: Were you aware of any war preparations or anything going on? At the time you were there up until two years before the war?

HL: No. Nobody thought of anything. It's a surprise to me. I don't know. Over there nobody spoke about war or anything. That's a surprise, early in the morning they start bombing (chuckles).

WN: So you stopped working in '39 mainly because you had another, third child?

HL: No, my second one.

WN: Second child?

HL: That's Hiram. I think I left December [1939] because he's a December baby.

WN: So you felt that you better stay home?

HL: My husband feel that I should stay home watch those two. Bring them up. Then I had two more boys so I stayed home with them all. Then five years later after the four boys, then I had my daughter. Then I stayed home with her until she was about four, four and a half. She wasn't school age yet, but I apply again for the job. You know, jobs weren't plentiful that time, so I just put in earlier and figure they probably won't call me until few months or half a year or something. But I thought wrong (chuckles). The following day they called me and they ask me if I want to work for [U.S.] Navy Exchange. My son was home and this fellow told him, "When your mother comes home, have her call us immediately."

And he left a number. So I called him back. He says, oh, if I can come in and fill up some papers. "And if you can start Monday."

Ho, I said, "Monday?"

And so, I didn't know what to do. Then I saw my friend, I said, "Oh, you think your mother can watch Carol for me?"

She said, "Oh, call her maybe. She has nobody."

So I called her and asked her if she can watch my daughter for me for a short period of time. Only maybe half a year, then she going school. Then she said, "Yeah okay." And then every morning on the way to work, I drop her off and then my boys, the school is close to their house, see, and they go down and pick her up and walk her home. So it wasn't no trouble at all. And then I would start working over there in the office.

WN: This is '51, yeah?

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- HL: Yeah.
- WN: Okay, I just want to talk little bit more about '39. So you stopped working in '39 and were staying home. So tell me something about December 7, [1941], what do you remember about that day?
- HL: Well, December 7, I just got up about, was close to eight o'clock I think. And I went in the kitchen, I was going put the coffee on, and then all of a sudden I hear a big bomb, you know. And then I run into the bedroom and my husband (chuckles) was standing on the bed, looking through the window. He said, "Oh, hurry up. Never mind, put everything away, get the two boys together." I had the two boys already. "Let's go up to the heights." So I got their things together and we all jump in the car and went to the heights.
- WN: 'Aiea Heights?
- HL: From the heights you can see everything burning down Pearl Harbor. And so we listened to the radio and they say get some kind parachuters down and Japanese down there and everything. [*Rumors of Japanese parachuters were circulated, but never substantiated.*] And so we were scared. And then later on in the afternoon, they called for Pearl Harbor workers to return to work. And then my husband had to go. And then my sister-in-law and my brother-in-law were up there, too.
- WN: Up there, you mean, you went to a house?
- HL: Yeah, to a house that my sister-in-law's brother-in-law live up there. So we stayed there and then the two brothers went down to Pearl Harbor. And then in the evening, it was getting dark already so we didn't know what to do so my sister-in-law said, "Oh, let's go home, then."
- So I said, "Okay."
- So she said, "Oh, I go and stay with you."
- She stayed at my house [*in 'Aiea*]. She has a daughter and I had the two boys. And then when we went home, you know, so dark. We just turn on the light, you know, one light. The windows were all blackout already, you know. But still I think that thing won't show little bit. And they yell at us, "Turn off the light!"
- WN: Who yelled at you?
- HL: (Laughs) I don't know. We don't know who. We were so scared so we just turn off the light and later on we slowly take a match and light a candle. We stayed in one room, the kitchen, because that's a smaller portion of the room. Because the small light, yeah. So those three were small yet. I think that girl was two years old and my second son about two years old. Then my oldest one was four and a half or something.

WN: Yeah, Robert was four and Hiram was two.

HL: Yeah, two.

WN: By the girl you mean that's your sister-in-law's one?

HL: Sister-in-law's one. She was two, too. They same age, just one month difference. So they stayed overnight and the men folks didn't come home till the next day.

WN: Oh. What department did your husband work?

HL: My husband was a carpenter. And the other one was rigger. I think the work is more on the rigger side, but they were asked to return to work. So I don't think they did any work, but they tried to help take those injured ones and all that kind. So that's what they did, clean up.

WN: Did he tell you what he did that day?

HL: No, he said they just helped and pick up the people and whatever help, that's all.

WN: So that day when you folks heard the bombing and you saw your husband standing on the bed, you folks knew right away what it was?

HL: Yeah.

WN: Lot of people say, "Oh, we thought it was practice or what."

HL: No, you know what happened? He [*husband*] saw the rising sun on that plane. That's why he said, "Oh, that's a Japanese plane." So that's why. I could [have] seen it from the kitchen window, too, if I stayed there. But I was so scared I just run in the bedroom to call him, but he was looking at it already. And so close, if they had just released one bomb, I think we were goners. Because they just passed over our roof. From that ocean side, they come pass the train track and just come alongside our house over there.

WN: So from your house, which is sort of just off Kam[*ehameha*] Highway . . .

HL: Yeah, right there.

WN: Could you see Pearl Harbor from your house?

HL: Yeah, uh huh. You could see Pearl Harbor.

WN: So from your house you could see the burnings.

HL: Yeah, Pearl Harbor. The burning. So they said, don't take a chance because you don't know how many more planes will come around. So we take off up

the heights. That's the safest place.

WN: And back then was there, you know, from Kam[*ehameha*] Highway you look toward Pearl Harbor there's a lot of *kiawe* and things like that?

HL: Mm, *kiawe* tree.

WN: Is that over there?

HL: Right. McGrew Point [*Navy Quarters*] they call that.

WN: Yeah, McGrew Point, was it there then? I mean was it [*occupied by the*] military [*i.e., U.S. Navy*] before the war?

HL: No, no, no, that was Dr. [*Charles*] Cooper's place [*i.e., home*]. I don't know whether he leased it or he own it, or something. But anyway, he had a big place. He had a gardener, which he had a house for them, and he had another home, I think, must be rented out or something like that.

WN: Do you remember going over there, McGrew Point?

HL: Yeah. I go there.

WN: So it was. . .

HL: It's a nice big place. Because the gardener has a daughter. And I knew her. And it's a nice big place and has lot of trees, fruit trees, like grapefruit and all those things. And swimming pool.

WN: Was he the only one who lived over there?

HL: He and the family, yeah.

WN: Yeah. And no other houses out there?

HL: There's another one along, this other end. That one was probably rented out, somebody living in there. And on this end was the gardener. They had another home over there for the family. It's a big place, you know. So that's why they [*i.e., the military*] took it over, I think, after that [*i.e., after World War II started*].

WN: Was there a train station there?

HL: Train---yeah, right by . . .

WN: Tracks were right there, right?

HL: Right by McGrew Point there. They stop right there. See, the train track is low, but at McGrew Point that train go over the bridge and it's high. It's a nice place, you know. And then below that, I think, they had a fish pond, too, for

somebody, I don't know. So my husband them used to go down where the train track is. And then on this other side had lot of homes that belong to the Japanese fishermen. It's right down the beach side. That's where his friends have a boat over there, rowing boat, they go row in the harbor and they catch crab. Him and his friends.

WN: So the fishermen were 'Ewa side of McGrew Point or the other side?

HL: No, town side, towards the Pearl Harbor side.

WN: I see. Today it's more like a recreation area, like a park over there?

HL: Yeah, that's the one.

WN: There's like a marina out there, now?

HL: Yeah. They have a restaurant there, now.

WN: Right, right, right.

HL: And then Richardson Center. That's a swimming [*pool*]. And then they have the place where you go down for the [*USS Arizona [Memorial]*].

WN: So, they had Dr. Cooper's residence which is where McGrew Point [*Navy Quarters*] is now? And after that were the fishermen?

HL: Yeah, fishermen homes. They have three, I think, three or four homes.

WN: I see. And then was Richardson Field there?

HL: No, nothing was there yet. The marina wasn't there. The Richardson Center came up later, I think. Or was it there? No, I don't know. I think it was there, but the marina wasn't there.

WN: And of course the [*USS Arizona* Memorial wasn't there (chuckles)?

HL: No, wasn't there.

WN: So you spent the night up the heights?

HL: No, we came home. We came home and stayed in my house (laughs). My sister-in-law and I and the three kids.

WN: How come you came home, did you feel safer?

HL: Because they don't have room for us. You know what I mean? So that's why we gotta go home. Because they have five children and a couple. And they only have two bedrooms, too. So we figure we gotta go home. We figure we don't know what to do but we just went home anyway (laughs).

WN: And so close to Pearl Harbor, weren't you scared?

HL: Well, we had to do something anyway (laughs). Yeah, we just went home. We weren't thinking about the planes, we worry about the parachuters coming down. So that's what we (chuckles) worry about. Anybody come catch us or something. That's the only thing. So we would lock up everything. Scared.

WN: Did you have Japanese neighbors at all?

HL: No, not Japanese. We have my brother-in-law on this side. And on the other side is one Puerto Rican lady, I think. We not afraid of the local [Japanese] people. But they said, you know, that they [Japanese] get parachute and they drop down and everything. So that was scary. And after that was calmed down though. They all went back work and everything.

WN: What about your parents' farm? What did they do that day?

HL: They went up to Pearl City I think, Waimano Home side. But they don't have any place over there for them. So they opened a place in Waipahu. So they all took them to Waipahu and they stayed there. I think Waipahu School or something, August Ahrens [*School*] or somewhere over there. So they stayed there for a couple of days. She said was so crowded. And they didn't want to stay anymore so they came home.

WN: And their [Helen Lau's parents'] home is . . .

HL: Over there, too. By the waterfront, too.

WN: Waiau?

HL: Waiawa.

WN: Waiawa, uh huh.

HL: But I think over there not too bad, though. They don't have the [military] installation and everything. Our side [ 'A/ea] is more scary. Over there, they have the dry dock, West Loch.

WN: So you had blackout?

HL: Yeah, blackout, that's bad.

WN: Could you drive a car?

HL: Yeah, you can drive, but you had to shade the lights. It's hard, nighttime you could hardly see because they watch you on the highway. If you don't have it shaded, the lights like that, they just give you ticket or something. But we don't go out in the night. And then besides, oh, everything is rationed. The gasoline is rationed. My husband them, they working as federal [employees], they have more priority. So they can get so many gallons. If you don't work

for any federal or anything that's important, they don't give you that much gas. Lot of people could hardly go out. So they don't drive around.

WN: What else was rationed besides gas?

HL: Oh, the liquor. Liquor and rice. Rice is not rationed but you had to go and get it fast because the shipment doesn't come in so often. And then the people [who have] money they buy bags and bags of rice. And that's how get shortage, eh. And I think there's some beef, too, that's rationed. But I used to do my buying from `Aiea Store. Mr. [Ching] Amona, he's the old person that live way up on the heights.

WN: Mr. Amona?

HL: Yeah, he owns the store there.

WN: Where was the store?

HL: Right where now, in `Aiea town where they have the new buildings now? You know Shell [Service Station]?

WN: Oh, the corner of Moanalua Road and `Aiea Heights Drive? Shell [station] yeah.

HL: Right there. They're all new buildings now.

WN: Oh, across the street from the Shell?

HL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: Oh, by Speedy's [Super]market?

HL: Yeah. All new stores just opened this year, restaurant and everything. Amona Store was right on the corner there on the highway. And then. . . .

WN: And across the street was the theater? Where the `Aiea Shopping Center is now?

HL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. On the other side, yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: So that's where Mr. [Ching Amona] had a store?

HL: Yeah, store. And he got everything. Hardware to meat. Stores used to be like that, you know. No more supermarkets. They have good meats. We know the butcher so he used to save us some meat and things like that. And then I know the girls that work there so sometimes they save ten-pound [bag of] rice, like that.

WN: So you had to go there, they didn't come deliver to you?

HL: No. They used to deliver, but wartime they stopped delivering because, you know, they don't have time or something, I don't know what.

WN: So before they used to come take orders and whatever. But when war started, no more?

HL: You can buy the things over there and they deliver it for you. Those days they used to deliver. All the markets. And Amona, he's a rich fellow. I think he was World War I, too.

WN: Oh, veteran?

HL: Veteran. And he has something to do with a Chinese America bank or something like that, too. He's well-off.

WN: Amana is what, Japanese?

HL: Amona.

WN: Oh, Amona? Okay, Chinese.

HL: Yeah, Chinese. He lived `Aiea Heights and he owned quite a few parcels of land over there. And I don't know what he did with it. I think the daughters inherit all that. He got only two daughters I think. Yeah, he's a smart man.

WN: So you had no trouble getting rice and things like that?

HL: No trouble. I didn't have any trouble. But luckily we don't drink, eh. So I didn't have to---that was one of the things that was shortage too.

WN: What about milk?

HL: Milk, no, I didn't have any trouble. Because we get most of our milk from over here. Not from the Mainland. See, whatever ship from the Mainland, I guess they use the cargo ships to ship something else. And so the shipment don't come as fast as regular. And everybody buying, they hoarding anyway (laughs). So we got along. I didn't have any trouble at all.

WN: Was there anything that you remember that was short? That you had trouble. Like toilet paper or anything like that?

HL: Toilet paper. Yeah, I think so. They had toilet paper shortage I think, but you know, we had to hang on. Tell the kids not to use too much, you know. Yeah, we did have that. And what else we had now. Food, I think, the rice was one of the main things. And meat because we don't have all our meat from here. The Mainland.

WN: What about canned goods?

HL: I don't know. I don't usually use much canned goods, so. I think that's about

all I can remember.

WN: So during the war you folks more or less ate the same thing as regular?

HL: Same thing, uh huh. And I never seen any shortage on vegetables.

WN: Your parents say anything about business getting good or not good during the war?

HL: No, it doesn't make any difference I think (chuckles). They still go on after that regularly same thing.

WN: And the train was running during the war?

HL: Yeah, right through.

WN: Did you ever have to go to town during the war years?

HL: No, uh uh. You don't go to town. If you go to town---wait, wartime I think we had our car already. The year before I married he [*father*] bought one. Those days was Model T. (Laughs) And he bought an old car, as long as it goes, you know. The money was scarce. So he bought that so I learn how to drive on that thing. Shift gear.

(Laughter)

HL: That's why he try teach me, but he says, "Oh, when you home, take it out and drive." And our road, you know, Nalopaka [*Place*] is a paved road going down to Speedy's. The thing now, they have the car parts.

WN: Napa [*Auto Parts*] Store.

HL: Yeah, right there. And you have to turn left and when you turn left that thing go down the hill. And that's private road. That's the road go down to our house and go left to my brother-in-law's house, and that's not paved. It's all rocks. So I started the car, you know (chuckles), and I drive down the hill. And you know those rocks, [*the car*] won't go unless you give it the gas again and again. It went on the hibiscus hedge (laughs). I left it there. He said, "What did you do?"

I said, "No, I couldn't control the car."

I didn't want to start it again because I might go deeper. So I left it there, but he got it out. He had the car for, I don't know, quite a few years. And then, his friends, too, lot of them used to borrow the car because they don't own a car. Then later on better models came out, then we bought one. I think was a Dodge.

WN: What about bomb shelter? Did you folks make any?

HL: Yeah, we did. My husband and his brothers had space on the other side of his home, see. And he has a area that slopes up, too, so they start digging in there and everything. And we left some things in there, but we never go in there because never had the siren or anything. So we never did go in there.

WN: So what did you use as roof? Galvanized iron, *totan*?

HL: No, I don't know what. I think it is. They have some boards, and then they put all the dirt on top or something. I don't want to go in there, so dark and mosquitos.

(Laughter)

HL: But we put some things in there, canned goods, in case.

WN: Do you remember a lot of military vehicles around the area during the war?

HL: Not on our place, I don't know. But maybe more on the Schofield Barracks side, I think. Because the [U.S.] Navy people all on the ship, they don't have their own car.

WN: What about McGrew Point and the building [*up*] of McGrew Point [*Navy Quarters*]? Do you remember anything about that?

HL: I think they had most quonset huts in there. And then that's for that enlisted people, I think. That's for the [U.S.] Navy. Yeah, they have lot of navy people over there, mostly quonset huts.

WN: Were there navy people going to Amona [*i.e.*, 'Aiea] Store or things like that?

HL: No. I think they came to Willy's. By that time Willy's had their store already.

WN: Oh, where is Will---where is that?

HL: Oh, [*where*] the Napa [*Auto Parts store is today*].

WN: Oh, Napa Auto Parts.

HL: Yeah, yeah, Willy's.

WN: That's where your sons worked?

HL: Yeah, uh huh. Right up the hill so that's where they was.

WN: Willy's?

HL: Willy's [*'Aiea*] Market, uh huh.

WN: So you saw some military people over there?

HL: Yeah. And then I guess they go commissary, mostly. Down Pearl Harbor and Hickam they have the commissaries.

WN: You folks have gas masks?

HL: Yeah, we all have gas masks (laughs). Ho, we tried it on, but I don't think I can stand it all day if you have to wear it. And the children have gas mask, too, you know, but I don't think they can wear that.

WN: That's the kind they put over their whole body?

HL: One big one like that. I don't know, clumsy kind.

WN: Did it look like a bunny? Shaped like a rabbit?

HL: No, no, no. It's a canvas thing and it has just like a can or something. I don't know. One of those old-fashioned kind, clumsy. We all had to go get our gas masks.

WN: Where did you go to get it?

HL: To that center, I think was `Aiea gym or something. They all had to go over there, register, and get their gas masks and everything like that. We didn't use it though. We didn't even have to. But we supposed to carry that everywhere we go. When we go store or we go anywhere, we gotta take it along with us.

WN: Okay, I was wondering, did you folks have to carry any kind of identification with you?

HL: Yeah, we have our special kind identification. And we had to carry that.

WN: Were you ever mistaken for being Japanese?

HL: Plenty times! (Laughs) I think more than Chinese, I think. Yeah, every time they talk in Japanese to me and then I usually say, "Yeah, no, no." They think I'm Japanese. They don't know, but I understand whatever they say. You know, Japanese [*from*] Japan, I wouldn't understand them. They speak different. If they local kind, well, I understand them.

WN: What about during the war?

HL: I don't know. The people that I know, know me, see, but I don't know all `Aiea. But we don't go out, mingle with outsiders wartime. So it's all in the `Aiea town. They know who I am, see. Even today now when I take the tours to [Las] Vegas or anywhere, some of them tell me, "Oh, you Japanese you marry Chinese?"

(Laughter)

HL: You know. Some *obasan* they don't know my last name, I just tell 'em, "I'm Helen." So they talk Japanese to me (chuckles). And then at the end they find out I'm not Japanese (chuckles)

WN: During the war, you know, when the war first started, you said you were scared?

HL: Yeah.

WN: When did you feel not scared anymore?

HL: After the next day, everything was calm. So I figure maybe they [Japanese] not coming back because they got bombed, too, eh. So we just relax that day and nothing happened. From then on I kind of feel that they not coming back. So I guess they didn't come back, too (chuckles).

WN: But, so during the war, though, you still had the blackouts?

HL: Yeah, still we have to leave it on until it was lifted. But that's hard work. We had to paint all the windows and all. You have to scrape it off after that.

WN: And you had [*i.e., gave birth to*] two children during the war?

HL: Yeah, the two.

WN: Steven and Donald?

HL: No, Hiram and Don. . . . No, oh, after the war.

WN: Well, after the war started?

HL: Yeah, Steven and Donald, uh huh.

WN: Steven was born in '42 and Donald was born in '43?

HL: Right. Those two.

WN: So you didn't have any problems with diapers and things like that?

HL: No, no trouble. As far as food and clothing, I didn't have any trouble with anything. Only the gasoline we just ration that thing. We don't go anywhere unless I have to take them to the doctor or something like that.

WN: How far away was the doctor?

HL: Oh, down Vineyard Street. We don't have doctors down here [ `Aiea]. After Dr. Cooper, we had this medical---they still have that office there, but Dr. [P. H.] Liljestrand was there, I think. But I don't go there because my pediatric doctor was on Vineyard Street. Dr. Chang's office was over there. Dr. Chang and Dr. Lee. So I go to him. So we go only for that purpose. We cannot use

the gas to go anywhere.

WN: That's a long way to Vineyard.

HL: Yeah, but as I said my husband them guys they have priority, they have more gas than other people. But still you cannot squander that thing. Liquor and the gas were the most important thing, I think. People used to drink up, too.

WN: Okay, let me turn over the tape.

HL: When Donald was born [*in 1943*], was still blackout, you know. And I had to go to the hospital, Queen's Hospital. So funny, the day before the blackout was being lifted, that's when he was born. [*By 1943, most blackout regulations were relaxed. By July 1944, all blackout regulations were lifted.*] And my niece had a boy, too. She had a boy. And what happened was that her son was born at about the same day, and she named him Breighton (chuckles).

WN: Breighton?

HL: Because that thing was going be lifted, eh (laughs). So she named him that.

WN: How do you spell that?

HL: B-R-E-I-G-H-T-O-N or something. She said, because that thing was going be lifted so she named him "Breighton."

(Laughter)

WN: What was it like being in the hospital during blackout time?

HL: Everything is normal.

WN: Oh, you mean the hospital could turn on their lights?

HL: No, I don't know, but they work on it. I think they probably had blackout, too. If you have everything blackout nicely, that thing won't show. But I notice they still have lights when we were there (chuckles).

WN: Okay, so what about finding school for your boys during the war? Was that a problem?

HL: No, no problem. They were going to the same school.

WN: Robert went where?

HL: Robert, well, elementary school they were at `Aiea Elementary [*School*], you know, by that place you go over the ramp to that [*Aloha*] Stadium. That school over there, right there. That's `Aiea Elementary [*School*]. They all

went to `Aiea Elementary [*School*] until after eighth grade they went to St. Louis [*College*]. So no trouble, they just walk up there.

WN: So '45 the war ended, was there any change in your life when the war ended?

HL: No, I don't think so. I think just before the war ended we went kind of back normal, because there's no bombing or anything. So was okay.

WN: Okay. Now, in '48 you said that your family left the farm, your mom and dad?

HL: Yeah.

WN: Yeah, what happened?

HL: I don't know. I think the lease probably ran out or they too old or something like that. They gave up and they just---since they bought that home over there only my two brothers and two sisters living there.

WN: In Manoa?

HL: Only weekends they used to go home. And then so, I guess they figure it's time they retire already. So they probably get enough income to carry them on or something. So they left there.

WN: How did you feel about that?

HL: What you mean how I feel?

WN: Were you sad?

HL: No, I was glad that they can retire and take it easy. It's about time. After that I think my dad and mom was enjoying it until he got sick, he's diabetic, see. And funny, all this time in that dirty mud and all that, they never got sick. Even when she was pregnant or something, we don't know. Doesn't show or what (chuckles). She used to go get the water and we still don't know she's pregnant or anything like that. She's so healthy, yeah. And my dad, too, is healthy. But after that he got sick. He goes to Chinese doctor and they don't know what is diabetes I think, they just gave him herbs. And so one day he called me, one Sunday morning, and he said he's very sick, that he doesn't want to eat and he just want to sleep all the time. So if I can come out. So I told my husband, "Let's go out. My dad not feeling well." So we went out I went to talk to him, I said, "What's wrong with you?"

He said, he don't know, he just take the herb medicine and everything.

I said, "Do you want to go to a doctor?"

He didn't refuse so he dressed up and we took him my doctor, Dr. Lee. And Dr. Lee looked at him and told me, "Good thing you brought him here. He's

about to go into a coma." He said his diabetic is real bad, you know. He gave him a shot and everything and said, "Okay, let him rest little while." And then we took him home. And then he said, "Bring him back for some more shots tomorrow." And he got well, not well, but you know, he's okay. He didn't go into a coma. But that diabetic was so bad that later on he got blind from that thing. So he was blinded, but he still lived until he was, I don't know, eighty-one or something like that.

WN: He died in 1961, age eighty-four.

HL: Eighty-four. Yeah, '61, that's the year my husband got sick, too. He had heart condition. And then Hiram---July he was going up to the Mainland, college. He went to L.A. [*Los Angeles*] and all that happened, everything happened that year.

WN: So after '48, your parents lived in Manoa?

HL: Yeah.

WN: And you folks were still living in 'Aiea?

HL: We lived there till 1970s, '76. That's the year my mother died, too, 1976.

WN: Okay, and so you were telling me earlier that you started working in 1951 for the [U.S.] Navy laundry?

HL: Navy Exchange.

WN: Navy Exchange. So this was totally different from your first laundry job?

HL: Yeah, but this time I was in the office with, I think we had six of us in there.

WN: What did you do?

HL: Calculate and type and all kind.

WN: This is with laundry [*section*]?

HL: Yeah.

WN: Were there any changes or differences in how you did it . . .

HL: No, it's a bigger laundry [*than the U.S. Marine Corps laundry*]. Had about 200 people working in there. We all had to do whatever we can. As the papers come in we had to work on it. And then later on in the years, we have our supervisor, Sachiko Furukawa, later on they made me assistant to her. So that when she go vacation I can take over her place. So we work it that way until I retired in 1976.

WN: Same year that your mother died?

HL: Yeah, uh huh. Twenty-five year service, 'nough (laughs). I took early retirement because my mother was sick, and I thought I could help her, but she went faster than I expected. In the meantime my husband had a heart condition, and then I figured I might as well stay home.

WN: You were only fifty years old, eh?

HL: No.

WN: You were . . .

HL: Sixty.

WN: I'm sorry. You were born in 1916, okay, sixty years old.

HL: I wish I was still younger.

(Laughter)

HL: We can retire [*at age*] sixty, [with] twenty-five [*years of service*]. So I said, "Okay, I'll take my retirement." And my daughter's baby, the first son, was born the same year, I think. And then I told her, "Oh, I have nothing to do except Mondays I going senior citizens. I can watch him." So I watched him for two years, I think. And every morning---every time we go down [*to Pearlridge Center*] my husband drove the car and he drink coffee with the gang and I used to take the little boy on that little train, you know, from phase one to phase two. He likes that.

WN: Monorail.

HL: Yeah, he likes that. So we go across and we do our shopping, window shopping and stuff and then we come back and join them with the coffee. And then we come home, spend about half a day almost. So they always call it coffee gang (chuckles).

WN: So today you have---you have one, two, three, four, five children and eleven grandchildren?

HL: Grandchildren, uh huh.

WN: So, you know, as you look back at your life, were you satisfied with your life?

HL: Oh yeah. Uh huh. I'm satisfied. My children grew up well and behaved and everything. And they made something of themselves. And my husband was nice, too, he always taking care of us. We lived down the old house and we stay there from the time I married until '76. And we didn't move out because we feel that it's close for the kids to go all around, you know. And 1948, I think, the [*Honolulu*] Plantation [Co.] close up, and they were selling lots up 'Aiea Heights. So we bought one. But later on, Chong's tract down below,

adjoining to our lot, he has a tract of land over there and he was going to subdivide that. And since his land was adjoining to ours, my husband figure we might as well buy a lot next to us and get our driveway to come right into our yard. That road ends in our place, yeah. So he talked to Chong and Chong said, "Yeah, you can have this piece of land right here," and they put up a home over there and we can have that land. And so we sold the `Aiea Heights land. So we came down over there, then we had that road paved all the way into our yard.

And then after that my son was working for [*an*] engineering firm, and he said, "Why don't you folks merge this thing bigger." Our land was about 8,000 square feet and the one we bought was 8,000-something, see. So he got the surveyors, they came in and they survey and they put it all in one. So our house is on this side and the new house was on that side and there's land on this side and land on that side. So later on he said, "Oh, let's build another house on this side." Then so we put a two-bedroom home over there. We rented that first one, and then after that we built another two-bedroom on this side. And there's four homes over there. We rented three of them.

And then he [*Helen Lau's husband*] retired when he had heart condition, but later on when he get well and can get around, he get his medication and everything, he can do most anything, but not heavy things. But he take care all the houses over there. He paint every home and everything, even plumbing and electricity, you know, minor kind. The toilet doesn't work or anything he takes care all that. So whenever somebody move out, that's hard work (chuckles). You have to clean it up and everything, I had to help him clean it up, so that was okay. So later on before he died [*in 1979*], when he got real sick, I think he know he was going or something like that, he put it up for sale and at that time the housing was still real in a slump, you know.

WN: Well, okay, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW